

## RESPONSE OF MUSLIMS IN TAMILNADU TO THE WESTERN EDUCATION DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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**ABSTRACT:** Education is one of the most important instruments for the development and empowerment of any marginalized community. This plays an important role in gaining a respectful and dignified life within society. Muslims in pre-colonial India strongly believed in two different types of education; contemporary and religious. Traditional and religious education was popular among Muslims but rational discourses (Modern Sciences) were absent in the curriculum. The policies of the British Government forced Muslims to rethink the outcomes and future of their traditional education system. Missionaries were the pioneers of Modern education in India, especially for women and they were also participating in the paradigm of education. British government policies and the spread of modern education among Muslim males created a space for the education of Muslim women. During the British period, a large number of institutions were established which were purely for the education of Muslims. As a direct impact inward educational consolidation happened also. In this article, an attempt is made to study the services of the Christian missionaries to develop education for the Muslims of Tamil Nadu during the colonial period.

**KEYWORDS:** Maqaatib, Madrasa Ulema, Muslims, Missionaries, Education

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### INTRODUCTION

When the British entered India there existed two different types of institutions for the education of Hindus and Muslims'. The Hindu schools were known as *patalasala*<sup>1</sup> which imparted education on Hinduism. *Maqaatib*<sup>2</sup> and *madaaris*<sup>3</sup> were the institutions which imparted knowledge of Arabic, Persian and some other subjects concerning Islam.<sup>4</sup>

With the advent of British rule in India, the educational system of India drastically changed. The Christian missionaries considered education as a good means to proselytize and established schools in different parts of India from 1659 onwards.<sup>5</sup> The Charter Act of 1813 assured an era in Indian educational history. The Act permitted the Missionaries to setup Churches across India for the cause of Christianity and further provided state funding for the impetus of Education in India.

By the renewal of the Charter, the Company decided to allot rupees one lakh per year out of the Indian English East India.<sup>6</sup> In 1835, the English East India Company introduced the Western system of education in India and with the accrued money since 1813 it established several English schools. At the same time, it allowed the missionaries to establish new schools and maintain old ones.<sup>7</sup> The Wood's Despatch of 1854 was another milestone in the educational history of India which formed the basis of the present educational system.<sup>8</sup> It stressed the need for the establishment of schools at elementary, middle and higher levels, colleges and universities at the Presidential towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Another important feature of the Wood's Despatch was the introduction of a new system known as the Grant-in-aid code.<sup>9</sup> By this system, the government earmarked a sum of

money to finance certain services like education, health, welfare, etc. This system of Grant-in-aid was mainly used by the government for the grant of funds for educational purposes. The Wood's Despatch wanted to utilise the services of the Christian missionaries and private agencies to spread western education in India by granting its aid under the Grant-in-Aid system. The Despatch further laid much emphasis on promoting education among Muslims and women. At this juncture, the Christian missionaries took a pioneering attempt to educate the Muslims in Tamil Nadu.<sup>10</sup>

## **MUSLIM'S EDUCATION ON THE EVE OF WOOD'S DESPATCH**

The Report of Public Instruction for 1856-57 provides detailed information about the educational backwardness of the Muslims in the Madras Presidency. Out of 3,447 pupils who pursued education 126 were Muslims which formed a mere 3.6 per cent. The Presidency College and the Normal school, Madras had four and five Muslim students respectively.<sup>11</sup> At that time seventeen Muslim pupils were pursuing their studies in four provincial schools. In the five Zillah schools and twenty-seven Taluq schools of the presidency, twenty-one Muslim boys studied.<sup>12</sup>

In the initial stage, English education was imparted combined both Christian and secular education. This pattern had its own impact on the education of the Muslim community in India. Even though they were fully aware that their social and material prosperity lay only in the spread of this new system among its members, the instruction on an alien religion prevented them from taking advantage of it. The Muslim parents held the view that if the world makes their wards irreligious and they refrained from sending their children to the schools, where Western education was imparted, they also disliked the schools where Islamic religious instruction was not available. They further believed that the system of education in the government schools and colleges would corrupt the manners of Muslim pupils and wanted their children to be taught only by Muslim teachers. Education at home was the fashion among the well-to-do Muslims and this pattern kept them away from regular schooling.<sup>13</sup> Thus they paid no attention to Western education. The Muslim community which was economically well-off was reduced to poverty after the advent of British rule. Muslims' rejection of Western education and culture and their attitude towards their successors in the seat of power had indeed many reasons. One of these reasons was imperial pride. Whereas Hindus were, by nature, too willing to submit to the rulers, Muslims were too proud of their past glory to submit to the British. Their pride in their racial superiority and their non-acceptance of the British and their education system too kept the Muslims out of Western education.<sup>14</sup>, the foreign Christian missionaries, who were one of the main agencies responsible for spreading education in India, went on openly and overzealously proselytizing in Mission schools, thinking that they were on a "civilizing mission" in the Indian Subcontinent. In this respect, Muslim historians argued that Muslims overwhelmingly objected to the Western education provided by the Christian missionaries because the purpose of the latter was "neither the education of the Indian natives nor the eradication of backwardness, but only the propagation of Christian ideas". The orthodox *Ulema* were never ready to accept the advantage of Western education and constantly opposed it. This further discouraged the Muslims from pursuing English education. This attitude of the *Ulema* further brought down the education standard among indigenous schools.<sup>15</sup> The Arabic Madrasa of Fort St George too was converted into a high school. Muslims considered it as a big challenge to their religious education. The British were more interested in fostering secular education than in looking after religious needs in the education of Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Briefly speaking, with the consolidation of British rule in India, the Muslim community was badly affected, as well as faced serious setbacks in all spheres of life. They, Muslims, plunged into a sense of humiliation and grief at the loss of their power, and as a result, they developed bitter feelings towards the British.

Due to these trends, Muslim education remained dormant and in pursuance of indigenous education, they

completely neglected Western education. It proved harmful to their development. It was in this period the report of Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control, the English East India Company introduced drastic reforms in the Indian educational system. Wood's report accepted the education of the entire people of India as State duty.<sup>17</sup> However, attracting maximum Muslims into the portals of educational institutions was a big failure in the beginning. Hence the government remolded its policy on education towards Muslims in general and issued instructions to the provincial government to take necessary steps to promote education among Muslims.<sup>18</sup>

## **MISSIONARY ATTEMPT**

When the Government was unable to establish schools for the Muslims, the Christian missionaries came forward to help the Muslims by establishing separate schools for them. On the advice of the Government of Madras, the Church Missionary Society established Harris school for the benefit of the Muslim boys of Royeppettah, Madras. Whenever the performances of its pupils were poor, it took various efforts to improve their educational standard.

### **Zenana Schools for Muslim Girls**

The missionary organizations, in their efforts to promote Muslims' education, started new schools for the Muslims in different parts of the Madras Presidency. At this juncture, the Christian missionaries concentrated their attention on improving Muslim woman's education. After seriously thinking of educating Indian women, the British Government and the Christian missionaries conceived the idea of *Zenana* education as a convenient device. The word zenana means the house of women's apartments. This word was a combination of two Persian words-*Zenan* which means women and *khana* meaning residence or house. In those days when women were segregated, the Christian missionaries established *zenana* schools and prepared both Hindu and Muslim girls for school education.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Smith, a European missionary was the first to propose *Zenana* education and in 1840 he recommended this scheme to the Bengal Presidency. Encouraged by this attitude and the provision of the Wood's Despatch, the Christian missionaries started Zenana education in the Madras, Vellore and Madurai regions.<sup>20</sup>

In course of time, the Zenana schools were established in many towns and villages. As per this educational scheme, qualified woman teachers visited the houses of the Hindus and the Muslims, grouped the girls and imparted education in various subjects. The Zenana schools taught one or more languages, arithmetic, history and geography up to the fourth standard and each class contained strength. Of three to fifteen students in the age group of twelve to twenty-five years, they functioned four hours a day and twenty – four hours a week.

### **Harris school for Muslim Boys:-**

Besides spreading education among Muslim women, the Christian missionaries took some efforts to educate Muslim boys also. Madras, the headquarters of the Presidency had a sizeable Muslim population and they lived in majority in the Triplicane, Royapettah and Mylapore areas. By 1854, the Madras-I-Azam, situated in Triplicane, rendered educational service to the Muslim boys of the city.<sup>21</sup> Since Royapettah, another Muslim dominant area, is situated some distance from Triplicane, the Muslim parents were reluctant to send their wards to the Madrasa-I-Azam for education. A school for educating Muslim boys had become a necessity. It was at this juncture, Sybella Harris, the aunt of Governor Harris (1854-59) created a fund of Rs.1,200 under the management of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a British missionary body for building a church or school for the benefit of the people Madras. Subsequently, it consulted the Madras Government and on the Government's advice, the Church Missionary Society established a school for Muslim boys at Royapettah.<sup>22</sup>

In January 1856, Governor Harris laid the foundation stone of the school building which was constructed at a cost of Rs.27, 750. In memory of this event, this school was named after him as Harris School. For promoting education to Muslims, the Government acted swiftly and granted aid for the development of its infrastructure. It was credited to be the first school to receive the financial assistance of the Government under the grant-in-aid scheme introduced by the Wood's Despatch. During 1855-56, a substantial amount of grant was issued by the provincial Government to an educational institution. It shows the keen interest the government evinced in Muslim education. The Harris School functioned for several years. Despite all these efforts, the performance of the Harris school was unsatisfactory during the last decade of the nineteenth century. To improve their caliber, Sell the Managing Director of the school recommended the government to cancel all special concessions and privileges enjoyed by the Muslim pupils. This act created widespread resentment among the Muslim community and they petitioned the government to voice their objection<sup>23</sup>. Whenever it found it difficult to start Muslim schools, it sought the help of the Christian missionaries to start such schools. In 1872, the Government took special efforts to start a school for the benefit of the Muslims of Tiruchirappalli. As the schools maintained by the Gospel Mission Society and the Government decided to utilize them for educating the Muslim boys of the town. Accordingly, it sent letters to them for starting separate classes for the Muslim pupils in their schools.<sup>24</sup>

Muslims began to show greater interest in education. They began to send their boys in good numbers to the Harris School and by 1914, the strength of the school increased considerably. However, during the next decade, the strength of this school was fluctuating which forced the Church Missionary Society to close the Harris school. At this juncture, the Mohammedan Educational Association of Southern India rose to the occasion and decided to prevent the closure of a school purely intended for the education of Muslim Boys. Finally, in May 1924 the management of the Harris School was taken over by the Mohammedan Educational Association of Southern India.<sup>25</sup> However, anti-British and anti-western feelings that had long been building up amongst the Muslim community culminated in South India after First World War.

## **SEARCH FOR INWARD CONSOLIDATION OF MUSLIM EDUCATION**

The idea of secularism directly threatened the position of the Muslims who were much influenced by Islam which also held a central place among them. Secularism is fundamentally non-religious in character. Muslims had every reason to fear that it was destined to displace Islam's centrality in their lives. Their historical conditionings were strong enough to resist the modern challenge thrown by secularism. Thus the Policy that was thought would force or at least persuade Muslims to take to modern western education, indeed made them withdraw from wider public life. The Muslims of Madras became suddenly aware of this state of affairs, where they were being literally pushed to adopt secular education, which was considered by one and all during this time as detrimental to Muslim religious interests and way of life. They became suspicious of British aims and refrained from sending their children to the secular schools opened one after another by the British government.

They were alerted in search of a certain inward consolidation on a community and religious basis. The immediate effect of this search for consolidation was the establishment of several Arabic Madrasas in the decades that followed the conversion of the Madrasa-e-Azam into English school.

When the Madrasa-e-Azam was established in Madras, a Tamil speaking Muslim Syed Mohammad Mapillary Labbai Alim Saib founded the Al-Madrasa – al-Arcosia at the Tamil Muslim centre of Killakarai in the extreme south to impart Arabic and Islamic education. Later in 1864, the Madrasa-i-Manbaul Anwar was established at Lalpettai. In 1871 the Riyaza-al-Jinan-fi-Uloom-al-Adyan was established by Peer Mohammad Ravuttar at Pettai in Tirunelveli district. In

1872 the Madrasa-e-Sayeedia came into existence in Madras and was run by the Badsha family. In 1884 the Madrasa-Baqiyat-al-Salihat was established at Vellore by Moulana Shah Abdul Wahab of Athur with the help of his close associates. The alumni of this madrasa spread in south India and were engaged in familiarizing the study of Arabic, Islamic theology and Jurisprudence among the people through the medium of Tamil In 1885, Dar ul Uloom Lateefiya was started in Vellore by Sayyid Shah Abdul Latif. Subsequently, in 1887 the Madrasa Ma'dan al Uloom and Madrasa-e-Mufeed-e-Am were founded at Vaniyambadi, another notable Muslim centre in the district of North Arcot.<sup>26</sup>

The establishment of a number of Madrasa was the direct impact of the introduction of secular education and the willingness of Britishers to spread it among Indians. As a result, *Madrasas* and *Maktabas* were opened one by one to consolidate Muslim religious identity against the gradual but steady onslaught of modern secular education. However, over time, the need for secular education was felt more and more by a growing number of Muslims, because in the British administrative structure, education was the key to employment in public services. Higher education could secure high posts that commanded power and prestige and high social status. Some Muslims sincerely felt that they should utilise these opportunities. In the meantime, the Director of Public Instruction in his report for the year 1880, expressed concern over this poor state of Muslim education.<sup>27</sup>

The very structure of the native social systems worked against the modern concept of female education. Hence women's education progressed slowly. In Madras Presidency, there were just 2.1 per cent literate women in 1921.<sup>51</sup> But in Madras, unlike in the other provinces, the purdah system was found only among a certain section of the population, co-education in the primary stages was not opposed by the majority of the people, early marriages though common were not to be found among many large and important communities and women teachers were coming-out in comparatively large numbers. All these factors contributed to the quick development of women's education.

There was a general belief among the Muslims that modern education did not cater to the needs of the home and neglected religious studies. Even though there were many drawbacks, obstacles and grievances, Muslim female education recorded gradual progress. The number of elementary schools for Muslim girls rose from 229 during 1921-1922 to 316 during 1926-1927 and the number of students increased from 11,629 to 16,859.

The compulsory elementary education was introduced in 1926 which was soon implemented in certain areas of the Madras Presidency. The condition of Muslim women was not at all satisfactory at the secondary level. In 1922, Hobart's school in Madras with 166 girls was the only Muslim girls secondary school in the Madras Presidency. The strength of Muslim girls had fallen to 270 in Hobart Secondary School. But 44 Muslim girls were studying in European high and middle schools.<sup>28</sup> The Muslim share in total population of Madras and Madura was 10.1 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively. The percentage of the Muslim population in the districts of North Arcot, South Arcot, Coimbatore, Salem, Chingleput and Nilgiris was 5.7, 2.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.2 and 5.3 respectively, while the percentage of women scholars in the Muslim population 4.5, 6.1, 8.6, 8.4, 6.2 and 8.2 respectively.

The condition of Muslim education was clearly reflected in the progress of their secondary and university or college education. During 1916-1917, there were just six secondary schools, especially for Muslims. But this number increased to 16 by 1926-1927, with strength of 2831 students.<sup>29</sup> By 1933 Muslim pupils comprised seven percent of the total strength of secondary schools. There was a more or less steady increase in the number of Muslim students in the secondary schools every year, both in schools especially meant for them and in other schools. In the sphere of college education, the condition of Muslims was uncertain. In 1916 the government opened the Mohammedan College especially

for Muslims, in Madras city. It became a permanent college in 1927-1928. In 1919 the Vaniyambadi Muslim Educational Association upgraded its secondary school into a college. During 1930-1931 there were 426 Muslim students in arts colleges and 74 in professional colleges, with another 194 in the two Arabic colleges at Kurnool and Vellore. By 1939-1940, the strength of Muslim students rose gradually to 635 in arts colleges and was 117 in professional colleges. Another 148 pupils were in Arabic colleges. The figures certainly showed the progress in Muslim university education. It did not reflect the actual situation because that could be ascertained only by comparing Muslim progress with that of the other communities at the university level.<sup>30</sup> Muslim colleges at Madras and Vaniyambadi, like many other colleges in the Madras Presidency, were situated away from many Muslim centres, especially of the southern districts. This dissuaded many Muslims to a certain extent from taking to college education. Muslims also faced difficulties in getting admission to non-Muslim colleges. Pachaiyappa College at Madras as a rule did not admit Muslims.<sup>31</sup> But the associations like the Muslim Educational Association of Southern India backed by a democratic, participative management system and is under the leadership of individuals drawn from educational, industrial and other walks of life formed schools and colleges across Tamilnadu.

The Western system of education among the Muslims of Tamil Nadu began to develop with establishment of the British rule. On seeing the educational backwardness of the Indians, these missionaries wanted to preach schools and imparted Western education among the Indians. In their educational service, the Christian missionaries bestowed much attention on the socio-economic improvement of the weaker sections. Their service was beneficial to the women and the Muslims. In the beginning, they concentrated their attention on the education of women, especially Muslim women. Through the Zenana schools, they created a taste for education and brought them to regular schools. These Christian missionaries, by way of their educational service to the Muslim Community, brought about an improvement in their socio-economic life. Later Muslims showed great response and decided to accept western ideologies. By which many social evils in the Muslims have been removed from the societies

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